

THE EXODUS OF
THE RUNAWAY SCRAPE

THE LADY WHO SAVED
TEXAS BLUEBONNETS

THE AGELESS WONDER
OF LIGHTNING BUGS

Texas Coop Power

FOR CECA MEMBERS

APRIL 2021

Rare Vintage

Football star-turned-
vintner finds that life
gets better with age



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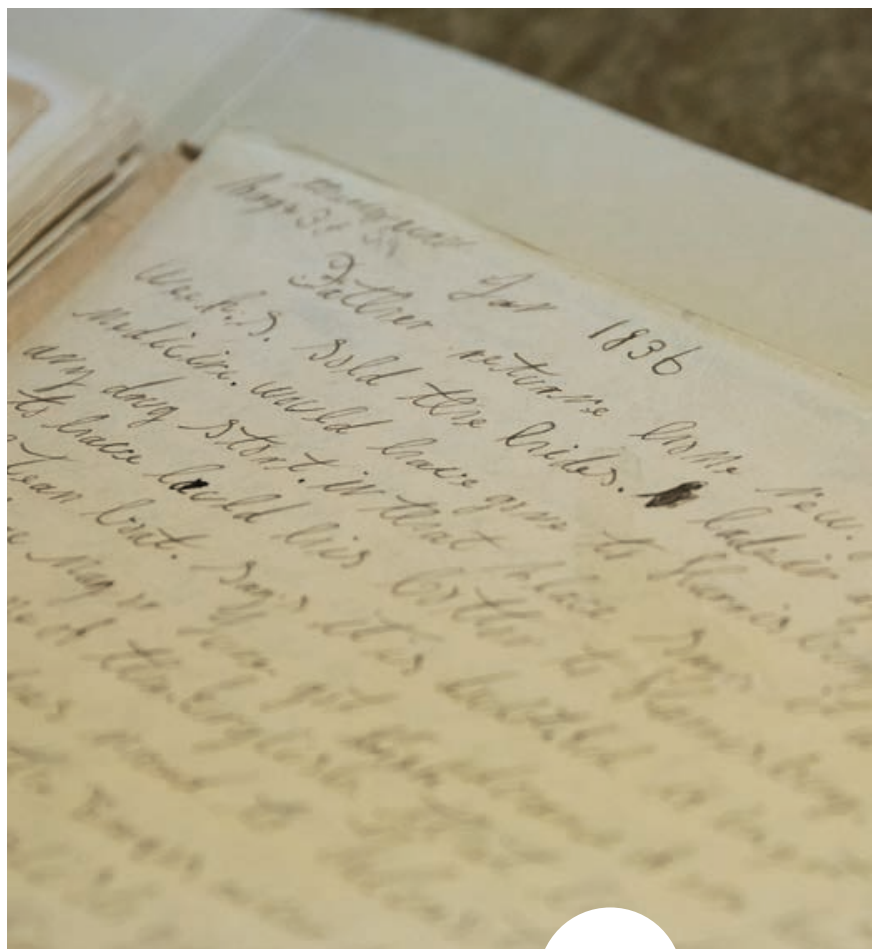
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April 2021



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Former NFL player Alphonse Dotson turns idea sowed in Houston into notable grapes and wines in Central Texas.

By Michael Hurd
Photos by Dave Shafer

The Runaway Scrape

The exodus of Texians is the least understood episode of the Texas war for independence.

Story and photos by Julia Robinson

ON THE COVER

Alphonse Dotson and LucyLu in his vineyard in Voca.
Photo by Dave Shafer

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A memoir from a girl in the Runaway Scrape.
Photo by Julia Robinson

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A Big Step

FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS? Boys take the spotlight.

Saturday afternoon national spotlight? That could require a gifted female athlete.

Someone like Sarah Fuller. The college soccer player from Sachse, outside Dallas, calmly stepped onto a football field November 28 in Columbia, Missouri, and kicked off for Vanderbilt University—becoming the first woman to play in a major college football game. Two weeks later she became the first to score in a game when she kicked two extra points against Tennessee.

“I just want to tell all the girls out there that you can do anything you set your mind to. You really can,” said Fuller, who was the goal-keeper November 22 when Vanderbilt won the Southeastern Conference women’s soccer championship.

All of the Commodores’ kickers were sidelined by COVID-19, so the football team recruited Fuller, who wore No. 32, her soccer number, and a sticker on her helmet that said “Play Like a Girl” when she made history.



75 YEARS OF ROPIN'

The Texas High School Rodeo Association, the largest such high school group in the U.S., began in Hallettsville in 1946.



Wheel Thrills

E.H. Green of Terrell bought what is believed to be the first gasoline-powered automobile in Texas, in 1899—a phaeton runabout.

Green was also in the first car wreck in Texas. George Dorris, co-owner of St. Louis Motor Carriage Company, which made the car, was driving Green to Dallas to show it off, and they got crowded off the road by a farm wagon and drove into a ditch.

TCP *Contests and More*

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Portraits

RECOMMENDED READING

Photographer Julia Robinson has tips for making better portraits in *Memorable Moment*, October 2020.



Michael Corker with chef Susan Kuehler at a hospital fundraiser.

TCP POWER OF OUR PEOPLE To nominate a co-op member who is making a difference in your community, email details to people@texascooppower.com.

Power of Our People Building Community Health

DURING MORE THAN 15 years as a board member of the St. Mark's Medical Center Foundation, Michael Corker has helped south Central Texas address the challenges facing rural health care. At a time when rural hospitals were closing, St. Mark's opened in La Grange in 2005 and serves Fayette and Lee counties. The 100,000-square-foot, 65-bed facility, complete with specialty clinics, also is a member of Fayette EC.

"We can provide the same great level of health care found in major cities," says Corker, a Fayette Electric Cooperative member.

Regional health care is Corker's most demanding cause, but he has made his mark on the community in other ways, too. Gale Lincke, a Fayette EC board member and past chair of the Lower Colorado River Authority board, says, "Michael is kind, gentle and unassuming, and he does everything for the good of the community."

La Grange businesswoman Linda Morrison has worked with Corker on the town's historic Main Street program, as well as on other causes. "He is just as committed to picking up trash on the median for a Rotary Club project as he is to raising money to build a hospital," she said. "He works hard for what he believes is right."

FINISH THIS SENTENCE
I THOUGHT I WAS SMART UNTIL ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town. Here are some of the responses to our February prompt: **You're never too old to ...**

WRITE ON

April 10 is National Encourage a Young Writer Day. Here's advice for young writers from *Texas Co-op Power* writers and editors:

Chris Burrows: Most editors are failed writers, but as T.S. Eliot famously said, "so are most writers."

Travis Hill: Write first, agonize later. You can't hone your prose if the page is blank.

Charles Lohrmann: Learn how to accept (and learn from) criticism without taking it personally.

Jessica Ridge: Revisions are fertile terrain for inspired writing. But know when to stop.

Tom Widlowski: Read whenever you can. It bonds you to fine writing.

"Writing is easy. All you have to do is cross out the wrong words."

—MARK TWAIN

Kiss in the car wash.

TOM AND EUNICE LEMON
PEDERNALES EC
CEDAR PARK

Get married. My fiancé, 88, and I, 74, will marry Saturday, May 8.

ANN SHAFER
CENTRAL TEXAS EC
FREDERICKSBURG

Say, "I'm sorry."

MARY PANDO
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
GRANBURY

Do the right thing.

PENNY HAULMAN
TRI-COUNTY EC
GRANBURY

To see more responses, read *Currents* online.



TRACI DABERNO

Inspired Devotion

Thank you for Michael Hurd's thoughtful column on Black History Month [*Time To Talk About That*, February 2021], along with your tribute to war hero Doris Miller. Something that always inspires me about the United States is the degree of loyalty and devotion it inspires even in people it has treated poorly.

Students sometimes ask me why we have Black History Month but not white history month. I tell them it's because we have white history year.

Walter D. Kamphoefner
Bryan Texas Utilities
Bryan



My yard is full of plants that family have given me [*Putting Down Roots*, February 2021]. Some have passed on, but I feel that I have a part of them in the plant.

JANET BARKER
VIA FACEBOOK



PAUL COX

Timely Message

"Michael Hurd's *Time To Talk About That* [February 2021] was a beautifully written, informative and timely essay. I appreciate your publishing it."

STEVE HOUSEWRIGHT
TRINITY VALLEY EC
CANTON

Pageantry in Laredo

I so enjoyed the beautiful illustration by Paul Cox that accompanied Elaine A. Peña's interesting article [*A Spectacle*, by George; February 2021]. He captured so well the feeling of these joyous occasions with the movement and colors of the waving flags, swirling gowns, flying feathers juxtaposed with the dignified and historic Washington reenactors (below). And all played out against the background of Laredo's lovely old buildings.

Dee Tusch
Pedernales EC
San Marcos

Living Heirlooms

I was given a clipping from a huge ficus tree my dad had after my dad and the tree died [*Putting Down Roots*, February 2021]. That clipping is now 6 feet tall. I have taken clippings from my tree, rooted them and sent them to my children along with my nieces and nephews. We all have a part of Dad's tree.

Sherry Crecraft Krupinski
Via Facebook

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
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Austin, TX 78701

Please include your electric co-op and town. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

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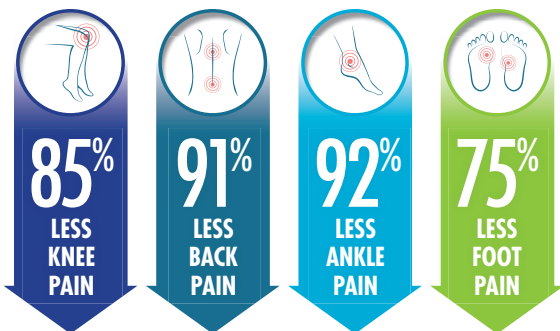
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Alphonse Dotson with a glass of Gotas de Oro at his winery in Voca.

THE SEED FLOURISHES

Former NFL player turns idea sowed in Houston into notable grapes and wines in Central Texas

An impressionable 10-year-old Alphonse Dotson happily trailed his grandfather, Alphonse Certenberg, as they toured the old man's Kashmere Gardens backyard in 1953 North Houston. They walked past two grazing mules, chicken pens, rabbit pens, a vegetable garden and two fishing boats underneath a carport draped with an arbor of ... grapes?!

Grandson asked grandfather, "You can grow grapes in Houston?"

In response, Certenberg just smiled, and off they went for deep-sea fishing in the Gulf.

"It was the first time I had been to his house," Dotson remembers, "and it was the best vacation week I ever had! The seed was planted."

That "seed" was Dotson's fascination with growing grapes, and the allure would lie dormant for decades—throughout a successful football career—and finally come to life in the sandy loam of the Hill Country, 115 miles northwest of Austin. There, Dotson and his wife, Martha Cervantes, became vintners. Their boutique winery in Voca grows several varieties of grapes and produces the award-winning Wines of Dotson-Cervantes from their 32-acre Certenberg Vineyards, a fitting homage to Dotson's late grandfather and a boyhood experience that was a harbinger for his future.

"Maybe once a week, from 1953, did I not think about growing grapes," says Dotson, 77, who was an NFL defensive end from 1965 to 1970, primarily playing for the Oakland Raiders and maverick owner Al Davis ("Just win, baby!"). Dotson played for Jack Yates High School in Houston's Third Ward, then at Grambling State University, where in 1964 he became the first small-college player named to a major All-America team.

There were days when he'd sit in his favorite restaurant at the Berkeley Marina, listening to a jazz pianist and pondering what he was going to do "after being, humbly, a gladiator."

And in those moments of deep thought, he kept returning to those grapes. Yet when the Sunday stadium din of Raider Nation ceased, Dotson began a journey to define his post-NFL life. He was destined to grow grapes for a living, but, for a change, that was somehow the furthest thing from his mind as he dabbled in event promotion, oil field trucking, being a sports agent and traveling—most fortuitously to Mexico and Spain.

Dotson settled for 15 years in Acapulco, which is where the Raiders caught up with him in 1994. NFL teams often include former players on junkets, and the Raiders invited him to travel to Barcelona, where the team was playing a preseason game against the Denver Broncos.

Also on the trip was Kam McLeod, son-in-law to one of the Raiders' part owners. McLeod owned a vineyard in Rutherford, California, and invited Dotson and Cervantes to visit.

"My research into growing grapes started with my Oakland Raiders family," Dotson says. "I visited with [McLeod] and was introduced to different kinds of soils, grapes and came back to Acapulco and started charting all that I learned. Martha said, 'You don't grow no plants here!' But you have to be listening to who's talking to you that you can't see, and then you have to pay attention."

By 1995, Dotson was fully locked in to learning about grape growing and the wine industry, and Cervantes came

Dotson-Cervantes winery's trophy collection.

aboard, reluctantly. The couple met in Acapulco, where she helped him find a residence. She was a highly valued employee for a timeshare company that managed resorts worldwide, working her way up from concierge to director of member services. Dotson says he kidnapped her from a job she couldn't be fired from.

"I fell to the ground when he said, 'We may have to move to Texas,'" she says with a laugh, but move they did—away from the lush mountains, Pacific Coast beaches, nightlife and other attractions of Acapulco, to Central Texas, where "the only neighbors you have are cows and horses. The kids said, 'Mom, you gotta get us outta here!' But we never gave up. God kept us together."

Dotson's last act as a sports agent was to negotiate a deal with the Green Bay Packers for his free-agent son, Santana, who also played at Yates and was a 1991 All-America defensive end at Baylor University. Dotson used his commission to purchase the land for his vineyard, and the couple moved to Texas in 1997.

"We didn't know doodly-squat about growing grapes," Cervantes says.

For all he and Cervantes lacked in grape-growing and winemaking knowledge, they made up for in hard work and study, talking with soil and winemaking experts, scientists, grape growers, and other experts who took the time to



mentor and advise them. And they hit it big in 2008 with their first wine, Gotas de Oro—drops of gold. Made from orange muscat grapes, the wine is described as "a medley of fruits—pears, star fruit and ripe peaches." Among its many awards, Gotas won gold at the 2019 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

Before producing their own wines, they focused solely on growing grapes (cabernet sauvignon, merlot and chardonnay) for Ed and Susan Auler, owners of Fall Creek Vineyards in Tow. Ed Auler has called Dotson's grapes "the best in Texas."

Jeff Cope, founder of the Texas Wine Lover website, declares, "I can honestly say that he has perfected white wines, dry all the way up to sweet."

Despite the couple's initial success, several years of late freezes caused grape production to drop, from yields of 110 tons to only 2 tons. Now there are plans for growth, including an expansion of the tasting room that will add a dining area and paving the dusty, rocky access road that is not unlike Dotson's path to success.

Ever amiable, Dotson flashes a wide, toothy smile and welcomes visitors to the tasting room, adorned with oversized photos of his playing days and magazine covers featuring him and his wife. Between sampling sips, he explains the design of their label, which features his signature floppy cowboy hat and a rose, symbolic of the yellow roses he gave Cervantes when they courted in Acapulco.

The label is distinctively silver and black with a background of the Raiders' shield.

"I wanted a label that represents both of us," he says, "but I also wanted to give a nod to Al and the guys I played with ... and to agitate the damn Dallas Cowboys!"

"When I asked Al's permission, he said, 'Just have fun, baby!'" ■



TCP WEB EXTRA Author Michael Hurd, right, got to know Alphonse Dotson when conducting interviews for his book *Thursday Night Lights*, the story of Black high school football in Texas.



TEXAS MINT

We are excited to announce the release of the 2021 Texas Silver Round – Revolution Series. This is the second release of a four-year series commemorating the battles of the Texas Revolution. Each Texas Silver Round is one troy ounce .9999 fine silver.

The obverse of the high-quality mint strike features Texas' iconic lone star in the foreground. The smooth engraving of the star is framed by a textured topographical outline of the state of Texas. "TEXAS" arches proudly over the top of the round's obverse in large capital letters, with "Precious Metals" presented inversely along the opposite side. The round's mintage year is engraved in the bottom left of the round, just southwest of what would be the Rio Grande bordering Texas and Mexico.

The reverse of the 2021 release displays a scene from the famous Battle of the Alamo. It depicts two Texian soldiers including the American icon, Davy Crockett, attempting to fend off Mexican soldiers attempting to breach the walls of the Alamo.



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The stunning 2020 Texas Silver Round depicts a scene from the Battle of Gonzales, with three Texian revolutionaries defending the famous Gonzales cannon, while brandishing the Come And Take It Flag.



BATTLE OF THE ALAMO

second in the series ● ● ● ●

The events of this famous battle took place on the days of February 23rd - March 6th, 1836. At the end of a 13-day siege, President General Antonio López de Santa Anna and his Mexican troops reclaimed the Alamo Mission, killing the Texian and immigrant occupiers.

The Texas Silver Round can be purchased in a monster box produced exclusively for the Texas Mint. Packaged in 20 protective tubes of 25 rounds each, the monster box holds 500 1-ounce Texas Silver Rounds. Built from durable cold-rolled steel and finished with a matte black powder coat, the monster box lid features an orange cutout of the state of Texas. Each sealed monster box is secured with a unique serial number and a holographic seal to ensure maximum product protection.

The Texas Silver Round is also available to purchase in a similarly designed and secured mini-monster box, which contains 10 protective tubes of 25 rounds each for a total of 250 silver rounds.



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THE RUNAWAY SCRAPE

**Exodus of Texians
is an unsung
episode of
the Texas war
for independence**

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON



The Texas Revolution is defined by its battles—the siege of the Alamo, the massacre at Goliad, the 18-minute Battle of San Jacinto that sealed the Texian victory. But there was a slower struggle that wet spring of 1836 that defined the revolution’s civilian strife. As Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna amassed troops across the Rio Grande, Texian rebels and noncombatants fled the looming conflict.

This eastward frantic flight from Mexican troops, toward the Sabine River—which separates Texas from Louisiana—and the safety of the United States, came to be known as the Runaway Scrape.

“The Runaway Scrape touched virtually every citizen in Texas,” says Stephen L. Hardin, professor of history at Abilene’s McMurry University, describing the exodus as the great untold story of the Texas Revolution. “I think the Runaway Scrape, far more than the battles, played a major role in the forging of the Texian character.

“It is tremendously important because if you look at the Texas mythos—Texans are tough, Texans are resilient, this notion that we can endure damn near anything because we’re Texans. I think that’s where it starts.”

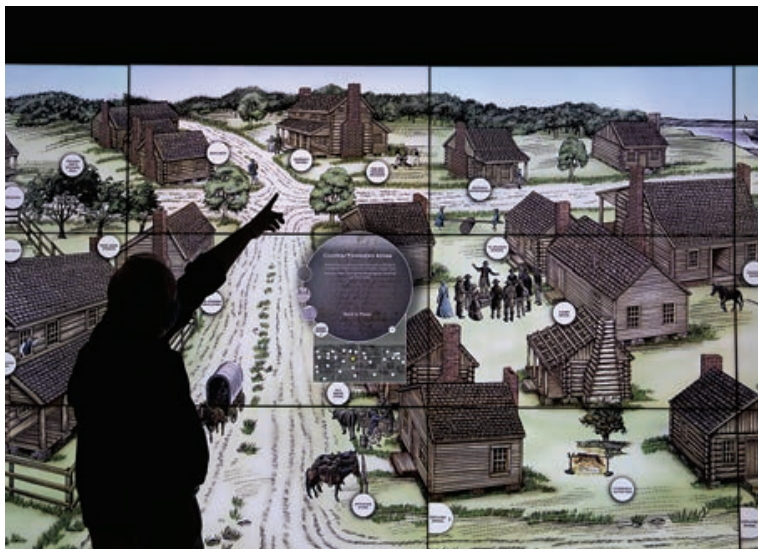
OPPOSITE The southern terminal of the Lynchburg Ferry sits across from the San Jacinto Monument. ABOVE A sculpture by J. Payne Lara at the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site depicts a family fleeing in the Runaway Scrape. RIGHT The historic site’s museum features an interactive map of the 19th-century town.

Colonists began their flight from conflict well ahead of the fall of the Alamo in March 1836, and for some of them, the escape culminated within a mile of the San Jacinto battlefield site in a dramatic crossing of the San Jacinto River. There, 5,000 settlers waited their turn at Lynch’s Ferry, desperate to outrun Santa Anna and his approaching troops.

About the time of the fall of the Alamo, Hardin says, the Runaway Scrape “goes into hyperdrive.” Sam Houston and his small, inexperienced army began a retreat from Gonzales, where the army had been gathering. The order to evacuate came at midnight March 13, and the Texians burned the town before they left.

As Houston continued his retreat, many of the 30,000 residents of Texas—including Anglos, enslaved people and Mexican nationals—fled Santa Anna’s army in the rain and cold, carrying what possessions they could on muddy roads and across flood-swollen rivers. In an April 1836 letter to a friend, colonist John A. Quitman remarked, “We must have met at least 1,000 women and children, and everywhere along the road were wagons, furniture and provisions abandoned.”

Dilue Rose Harris was 11 when she fled her home in Stafford’s Point, just southwest of what is today Houston, with her family. In 1898 she wrote of her memories of the Runaway Scrape: “We left home at sun-set. Hauld bedding clothing and provision on the sleigh with one yোক of oxen. Mother and I walking she with an infant in her arms.”



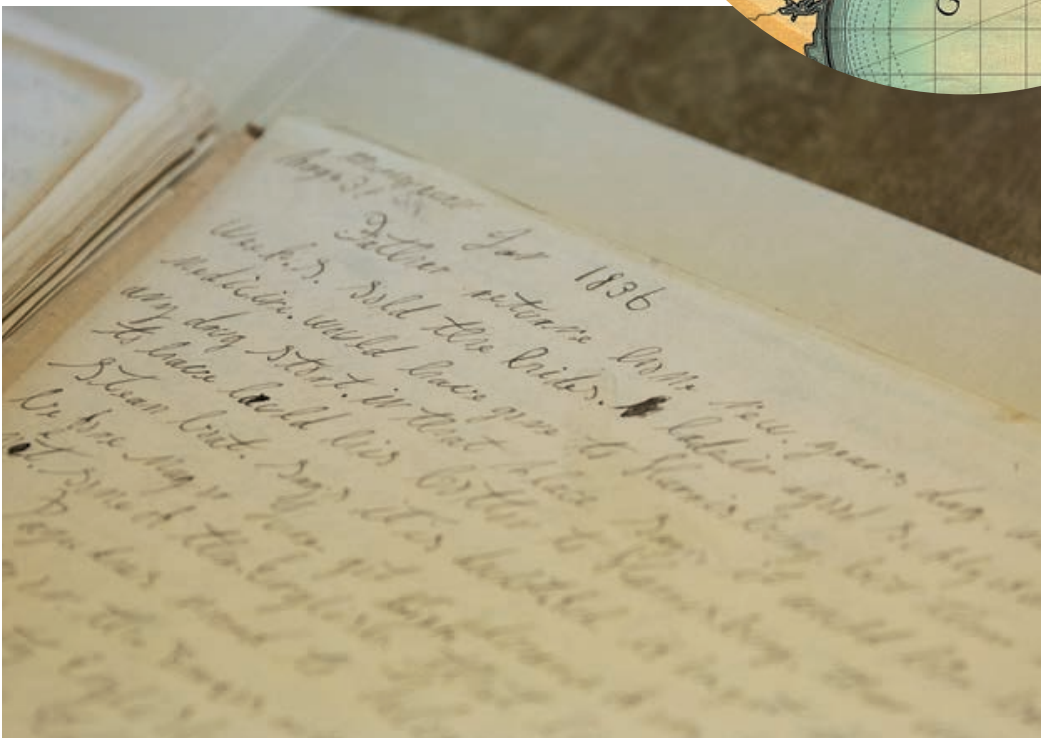
Guy Bryan, a nephew of Stephen F. Austin, was 16 when he fled his home near San Felipe de Austin with his family. He told his story in an 1895 letter to Kate Terrell, a survivor of the Runaway Scrape and writer who chronicled the event. “Some families left their home with their table spread for the daily meal; all hastily prepared for flight as if the enemy were at their door,” he wrote.

The second-largest city in Texas on the eve of the revolution, San Felipe had close to 600 residents and was a bustling center of government and commerce. As in the town of Gonzales, the Texians and their army burned the town behind them, a strategy to deny Santa Anna’s troops food and supplies.

Angelina Peyton Eberly, a tavern owner, recalled in a letter to a friend the evening she evacuated San Felipe across the Brazos River: “Much was left on the river banks. There were no wagons hardly ... few horses, many had to go on foot the mud up to their knees—women and children pell mell.” Safely across the river, Eberly could hear “the popping of spirits, powder &c [etc.] in our burning homes.”

Creed Taylor, a Texian soldier who escorted his family to safety before fighting in the Battle of San Jacinto, wrote in 1900, “I have never witnessed such scenes of distress and human suffering. ... Delicate women trudged alongside their park horses, carts, or sleds from day to day until their shoes were literally worn out, then continued the journey with bare feet, lacerated and bleeding at almost every step. Their clothes were scant, and with no means of shelter from frequent rains and bitter winds, they traveled on through the long days in wet and bedraggled apparel, finding even at night

“Some families left their home with their table spread for the daily meal; all hastily prepared for flight as if the enemy were at their door.”



Dilue Rose Harris' memoirs are at the Albert and Ethel Herzstein Library in the San Jacinto Museum of History in La Porte.

MAP: JOHN A. WILSON



TOP Many families in the Runaway Scrape passed through what is now the San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site. ABOVE A frieze on the San Jacinto Monument.

little relief from their suffering since the wet earth and angry sky offered no relief. ... Thus these half-clad, mud-besmeared fugitives, looking like veritable savages, trudged along."

Harris, Bryan and Eberly converged with other refugees at Lynch's Ferry, on the south bank of the San Jacinto River, within a mile of the future battlefield at San Jacinto. "Arrived at the San Jacinto River in the night," wrote Harris. "There were fully 5,000 people at the ferry. ... We waited three days before we crossed. ... It was all-most a riot to see who should cross first."

The crossing was daunting. The ferry was a wooden, flat-bottomed raft, hand-drawn along cables. A few dozen people and possessions could travel per trip.

After crossing the ferry at Lynchburg, Bryan and his party moved 6 miles southeast. "When we joined the long line of 'Runaways' at Cedar Bayou the sight was most piteous. I shall never forget the sight of men, women and children walking, riding on horseback, in carts, sleds, wagons and every kind of transportation known to Texas."

Many became ill or died along the route. There are no official records of deaths, but historians estimate hundreds died. "Measles, sore eyes, whopping cough, and every other disease that man, woman or child is heir to, broke out among us," wrote Harris. Her younger sister died of a flux—diarrhea—and was buried at Liberty. With scant updates, families kept moving east, toward the Sabine River and the safety of the United States.

Harris recalled one evening: "All of asddnt we heard a report like distant thunder. ... Father said it was cannon that the Texas army and Mexicans were fighting." They thought the Texians had lost because the cannon fire ended so quickly. They hurried eastward until a messenger found them and yelled, as Harris wrote, "Turn back, turn back. The Texas army has whipped the Mexicans. No danger, no danger."

Relieved but exhausted, many halted their exodus. Refugee camps sprang up for families to rest and regroup. "They suffered just as much and sometimes more on the return trip," Hardin says. Many returned to find their homes burned and their livestock missing.

Harris' memoirs recall quicksand and a fatal alligator attack when they turned back toward home after five weeks on the run. Eberly had traveled more than 100 miles before hearing of the victory at San Jacinto. Once back in San Felipe, Eberly found her tavern and home in ashes, "the place bare of everything but the ruins of all my things burnt up," she wrote. Many residents, including Eberly, abandoned San Felipe de Austin, which never regained its former stature. Many left Texas for good after the spring of 1836. For those who stayed, the scrape left a scar.

Hardin explains that many Texians were hesitant to rebuild after the war. "I've found many people saying they don't want to invest in a fancy house because the Mexicans might invade again, and we're going to have to burn it down again," he says. "So that plays a huge role in the Texian psyche for years because they just didn't have the confidence.

"'Remember the Alamo'? What they're remembering is the Runaway Scrape and the hardship." ■

TCP WEB EXTRA Check out some of the relics that remain from the Runaway Scrape.

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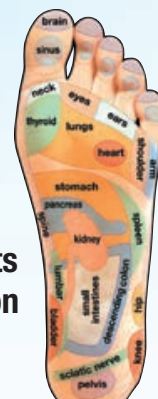
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The blade is full tang, meaning it doesn't stop at the handle but extends to the length of the grip for the ultimate in strength. The blade is made from 420 surgical steel, famed for its sharpness and its resistance to corrosion.

The handle is made from genuine natural bone, and features decorative wood spacers and a hand-carved motif of two overlapping feathers—a reminder for you to respect and connect with the natural world.

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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MESSAGE
FROM
GENERAL
MANAGER

**ALAN
LESLEY**

Thank a Lineworker on April 12

AS I WRITE THIS it is 73 degrees outside. But just three days ago, it was still below freezing as we came off a record-breaking cold spell. You know what they say about Texas weather: If you don't like it today, just wait till tomorrow. That has certainly been true for us since 2021 blew in on New Year's Eve with a damaging snow storm, followed a week later with another snow storm, then with the polar vortex that shut down a large portion of Texas.

If you were asked to associate an image or a person with CECA, I bet you would picture a line-worker. Among the most visible employees of the co-op, lineworkers work tirelessly to ensure our community receives uninterrupted power 24/7.

Line work is listed as one of the top 10 most dangerous jobs in the U.S. This is understandable as lineworkers perform detailed tasks near high-voltage power lines. Regardless of the time of day, stormy weather or other challenging conditions, they must climb 40 feet in the air, often carrying heavy equipment to get the job done.



Line work is not a glamorous or easy profession. It takes years of specialized training, ongoing education, dedication, and equally important, a sense of service and commitment. How else can you explain their willingness to leave the comfort of their homes to tackle a challenging job in difficult

conditions, when most are sheltering comfortably at home? This dedication and sense of service to the community is truly what sets lineworkers apart. That's why we set aside the second Monday in April as National Lineman Appreciation Day to celebrate and recognize the men and women who work around the clock to keep the lights on.

While lineworkers may be the most visible employees at CECA, it's important to note that there is a team of highly skilled professionals working behind the scenes. Engineers provide ongoing expertise and guidance on the operations side of the



CURRENT NEWS

Thank
you!

WE ALWAYS KNEW CECA had the best members in Texas, but your response to this year's winter weather proves it. All of us at CECA sincerely appreciate your patience and understanding as we responded to the extensive damage brought by back-to-back snow storms and the massive power issues during February's polar vortex. Many of you contacted us during these events, and your kindness was amazing.

If you were one of the many who wrote or called and thanked us for all we did, or if you brought food and supplies to get us through the days and nights, please know that your words and deeds have been compiled and shared among all CECA employees. It means so much to them to know you were thinking of them as they worked almost nonstop to repair and prevent as much damage as possible as quickly and safely as possible.

Thank you for being the wonderful, caring members you are! ■

Pam McClain Retires From CECA

PLEASE JOIN US in congratulating Pam McClain on her retirement from CECA after more than 20 years of service.

McClain began her service to the membership in 1999 as a customer service representative working out of the Comanche and Early offices. In 2012 she transferred to the new construction department, and in 2014 she transitioned into her current position in the dispatch office.

In retirement McClain said she plans to spend her days doing "whatever I feel like doing." Her No. 1 goal is to spend time with her family, which includes teaching her grandson how to ride horses. She also plans to garden and crochet.

"I've loved working here," McClain said of her time at CECA. "Everyone here is like family, and I'm going to miss them, but I do plan on coming back and visiting."

She also says she will miss the members she has come to know and love over the years and hopes to see them all at the next CECA annual meeting. ■



co-op. Member service representatives are always standing by to take your calls and questions. Our information technology experts are continuously monitoring our system to help safeguard sensitive data. And these are just a few of the folks who work together to ensure we can deliver the service and reliability you expect and deserve. Without them, our lineworkers wouldn't be able to "bring the light" to our community.

Our dedicated and beloved lineworkers are proud to represent CECA, and they deserve all the appreciation and acco-

lates that come their way on Lineman Appreciation Day.

On April 12, and any time you see a co-op employee, I hope you'll join me in thanking them for their exceptional service. I also hope you'll remember that you have a dedicated team of professionals working behind the scenes at the co-op whose commitment to service runs just as deep. ■

LINEWORKERS BRING THE LIGHT.

Lineworker Appreciation Day

On April 12, remember to
#ThankALineworker.

RAGING STORMS, winter sleet, scorching afternoons—everything's bigger in Texas, even weather events. You can bet that just when you're taking off your shoes to cozy up indoors, a CECA lineworker is lacing up his boots to head out.

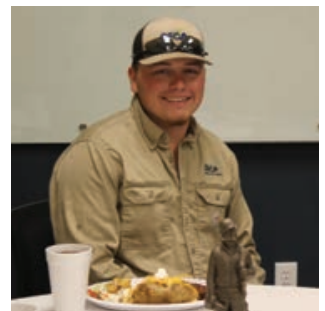
Across the country, lineworkers are always at the ready to work in often-challenging conditions to keep the lights on. That's why on April 12, America's electric cooperatives will recognize National Lineman Appreciation Day.

Our lineworkers see it all—often from the top of a 45-foot pole—and they don't just stand ready for wild weather events. Any time a member's power goes out, no matter the day or

time, our team quickly heads to the site of the interruption and doesn't quit until the job is done.

On Thursday, January 28, CECA honored all of its employees with a steak dinner in appreciation of the countless hours they put in and selfless dedication they exhibited during snow storms earlier this year. Employees worked long hours, from early morning until late in the night, to restore power to the membership.

On April 12, and throughout this month, let's celebrate our lineworkers, the often unsung heroes behind the grid—the people who light up our lives and our community. ■





RAVSKY | ISTOCK.COM

Lamb and Root Vegetable Stew

2 pounds lamb shoulder or roast, cut into 1-inch pieces
 ¼ cup flour
 1 teaspoon pepper
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 2 medium sweet yellow onions, chopped
 4 cloves garlic, minced
 ¼ cup white wine
 2 cups water or chicken broth
 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary (or 1 teaspoon dried)
 1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano (or 1 teaspoon dried)
 6 medium carrots, chopped
 1 pound A-size red potatoes, quartered
 ½ teaspoon red pepper
 1 teaspoon sea salt

1. Put lamb in a large storage bag with flour and pepper and shake to coat thoroughly.

2. Heat olive oil in large soup pot on medium heat, remove lamb from bag and cook until pieces are lightly browned. Add onion and garlic and cook until translucent, about 5 minutes. Deglaze with wine.

3. Transfer to a slow cooker, add remaining ingredients and stir thoroughly. Cook on low 4–5 hours or until carrots and potatoes are soft. Taste and adjust seasonings.

Serves 4–6.

TCP Find this and more delicious recipes online at TexasCoopPower.com.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Good Friday Friday, April 2

Our offices will be closed in observance of the holiday.

Easter Sunday, April 4

Lineman Appreciation Day Monday, April 12

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Nature's Nursery

Texas-native sea turtles need responsible beachgoers to support comeback

BY AMANDA OGLE • PHOTO BY SUE WOLFE

A KEMP'S RIDLEY SEA TURTLE emerges from the Gulf of Mexico onto a Padre Island beach and clambers toward a dune in search of a place to dig a nest and lay up to 100 eggs. Before she finds the right spot, beachgoers approach and take photographs. Instead of nesting, the frightened turtle retreats into the water.

This is a scenario that Nancy Lubbock, a volunteer with the Padre Island National Seashore's Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery, has witnessed several times. "You just don't know where she's going to end up or lay the eggs," says Lubbock.

Donna Shaver, chief of the division, is fearful when nesting turtles are frightened back into the water. If the turtle heads back into the surf before laying eggs, it could be days before she comes ashore again.

"She needs to lay those eggs then and there," Shaver says. "Just the process of her coming on the beach makes her vulnerable to coyotes or people."

Every year, from April to mid-July, Kemp's ridley sea turtles, a critically endangered species, shuffle onto Texas beaches to lay eggs. Each one is onshore less than an hour, but some beachgoers are lucky enough to witness the process. "Just let her do her thing and realize how lucky you are to get to see one of these turtles," Shaver says. "You've hit the jackpot."

Look but don't touch, Shaver says. It's illegal and harmful. "We don't even touch them without gloves," she says, "and you can harm them by squeezing the eggs or turtles too much."

Staff and volunteers with Shaver's program find, document and protect Kemp's ridleys. They retrieve the precious eggs and incubate them 50–60 days, until they hatch. Then the hatchlings can be released into the Gulf.

Over the past several years, Kemp's ridleys' numbers have increased in Texas overall, but the number of nests found on South Padre Island National Seashore has fluctuated recently from a high of 219 in 2017 to 136 in 2020. In 1994, only a single nest was found.

Kemp's ridleys are the smallest of the five sea turtle species in the Gulf, making it hard to see their tracks in the sand. They also love to nest on windy

days, in high tide and during big weather fronts, so their faint tracks are often blown or washed away.

"Kemp's ridleys are very hard to spot," Shaver says. "And with their tracks getting blown away or obliterated by rain, people on the beach sometimes don't know to watch out for them."

In Texas, driving on beaches is allowed, and that makes Kemp's ridleys vulnerable to inattentive drivers. Shaver explains that the turtles like the soft sand of the beach roadways. She works to educate people on the turtles' habits, hoping to achieve a balance between recreation and protection.

Maureen Hurlow, a volunteer with the program since 2005, says that one of the most crucial precautions beachgoers can take is driving slowly and observing speed limits. When turtles are nesting, she explains, they go into a trance and become vulnerable to vehicles. "We haven't seen a turtle get hit on the national seashore, but we know it's happened in South Texas," she says. "We feel as the turtle population increases, and people are not watching out for them, it's only a matter of time because the turtles are very hard to see. Just slow down; you'll get there."

Another threat to Kemp's ridleys' resurgence is people digging holes in the sand for fire pits or sand castles. Nesting turtles and hatchlings can fall into holes and get trapped. To prevent this, it's important that beachgoers fill in any holes they dig. Lubbock also advocates taking everything you bring to the beach back home—especially water bottles, plastic bags and fishing line. "The line gets wrapped around their flippers, and they can get caught in trash and canopies," she says. "Water bottles and plastic bags also look like squid to them, and they try and eat them, which will kill them."

Kemp's ridleys have been around for 4 million years, and conservationists are determined to help them thrive. "We're going to have to all do our part and continue to work hard to make sure Kemp's ridleys continue to have success," Lubbock says. ■



A Kemp's ridley sea
turtle hatchling release
on North Padre Island.



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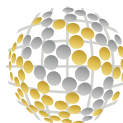
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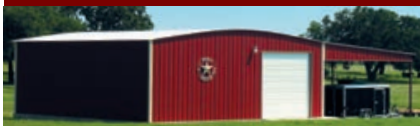
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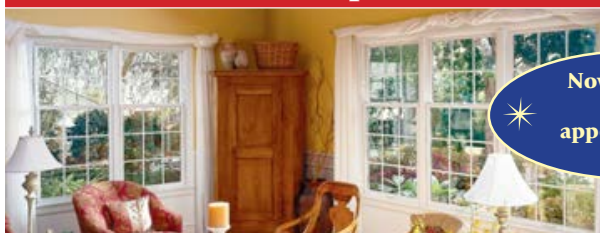


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The Bluebonnet Lady of Texas

A San Antonio civic leader galvanized women's groups to save the state flower

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS • ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID VOGIN

BLUEBONNETS WERE SO overpicked in the early 1920s that Sallie Ward Beretta worried they'd go extinct. The San Antonio civic leader launched a conservation campaign, which she unveiled at a luncheon for the City Federation of Women's Clubs.

Beretta placed paper bluebonnets on each table to help make her point: Unless the women got behind her campaign, she exhorted, the state flower would exist only as paper blooms. Everyone there joined her cause.

So did the San Antonio Area Council of Girl Scouts, where Beretta served as president. To further her cause, Beretta recruited volunteers to gather and package

bluebonnet seeds from fields around the city. She then mailed seed packets to Scout troops and women's clubs across the state. Some seeds even crossed state and national borders, and recipients in Alaska, New York and even South America reported growing successes to Beretta.

To bolster her campaign, Beretta collected stories, poems and music about bluebonnets, such as the *Texas Bluebonnet Song* by Julia D. Owen of Navasota. She also hosted gardening experts and promoted the slogan: "Save the wild-flowers of Texas."

In an October 26, 1923, letter, she implored members of a Laredo social club not to change their organization's name

from the Blue Bonnet Club to the Border Lassies, lobbying for her conservation movement, which was "getting people to promise not to tear them up by the roots."

She wrote that noted landscape artist Julian Onderdonk of San Antonio "devoted his life to immortalizing the bluebonnet," describing him as "our greatest Texas painter." Two weeks before the artist died, Beretta confided, "He told me that he considered the move that I was starting for the conservation of the bluebonnet was one of the finest ever started, and that he would do all he could to help it."

Her pleas hit home. The group changed its name back to the Blue Bonnet Club. The following January, members said in the *Laredo Times* that they planned a bluebonnet campaign for spring.

Beretta's bluebonnet work continued into the 1930s. In March 1931 she and her Scouts sought to ban the sale of bluebonnets in market stands and stores. "The Girl Scouts each year gather bluebonnet seeds and plant many of them along the highways," *The San Antonio Express* reported. "Doubtless many of the flowers being sold were from plants that grew from seeds sown by the scouts." Two years later Beretta directed a film made by the Girl Scouts that featured bluebonnet scenes. She and the Scouts also lobbied, unsuccessfully, to change the name of the Sunken Garden Theater in Brackenridge Park to the Bluebonnet Bowl.

Beretta became widely known as the "Bluebonnet Lady of Texas." But her civic-mindedness reached far beyond wildflowers. Her leadership roles included 19 years on the board of regents for Texas State University, then called the Southwest Texas State Teachers College. On the San Marcos campus, Beretta Hall, a Spanish-style dorm named in her honor, still houses students, and an annual award to an outstanding female student is given in her name. ■

Fresh Herbs

Give dishes, including scones, lentils and smoked pork, a distinctive zing

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

One of the greatest pleasures of having a garden is the ability to go outside and snip a few fresh herbs for a meal. It's a bonus that herbs are easy to grow because a simple sprinkling of them can take a dish to the next level. These savory scones are a wonderful addition to a breakfast spread, paired with smoked salmon. Or serve them alongside soups and stews at dinner. The mini size is perfect for nibbling, but you can make eight larger scones instead, if you prefer.

Dill Scones

2 cups flour
¼ cup chopped fresh dill
2 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
4 tablespoons very cold butter
¾ cup milk, plus 1 tablespoon, divided use

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment.
2. In a large bowl, combine flour, dill, baking powder, salt and pepper. Grate the butter into the bowl, then stir to combine so that butter is coated with flour mixture. Alternatively, cut in butter with a pastry blender or two knives.
3. Stir in ¾ cup milk and mix until a shaggy dough forms. Scoop dough out onto a floured surface and knead a few times to form a cohesive ball. Divide dough into two balls and flatten each to a circle about ½ inch high. Cut each circle into wedges then place onto baking sheet. Brush the tops with remaining tablespoon of milk.
4. Bake 18–20 minutes, until golden.

MAKES 16 MINI OR 8 LARGE SCONES

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Herb Pizza Dough.





Texas Hummus

JOY WATSON
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

If you're a fan of dips, this take on hummus is an excellent addition to your recipe box. Watson created this recipe for a family hummus cook-off, adding the familiar Texas flavors of cilantro and tomatoes with chiles to the Mediterranean classic.

2 tablespoons olive oil
½ cup chopped sweet onion
½ cup fresh cilantro
¼ cup fresh parsley
¼ teaspoon cumin
¼ teaspoon dried oregano
¼ teaspoon grated fresh garlic
(about 1 clove)
1 can (10 ounces) diced tomatoes
with mild green chiles
1 can (15 ounces) garbanzo beans
Salt and pepper, to taste
Tortilla chips, to serve

1. Heat olive oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Sauté onion, cilantro, parsley, cumin, oregano and garlic until the onions are translucent, about 8 minutes.
2. Drain the tomatoes and add to the vegetables to warm. Drain the garbanzo beans and pour into a blender or food processor. Add the warm vegetables to the beans. Pulse the mixture until it is the consistency of a dip but not completely smooth. Taste and add salt and pepper as desired. Serve with tortilla chips.

MAKES 2½ CUPS

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

Herbaceous Lentils Crockpot-Style

PAMELA RYMAN-MOIR
WOOD COUNTY EC



Cozy up to a bowl of flavorful lentils simmered with pork and herbs. Brown lentils are ideal for this dish, as they retain their shape and texture well during long cooking times. Serve with rice if you like or enjoy on its own.

SERVES 8

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 pound ham steak, diced
4–6 strips bacon, chopped
1 onion, diced
1 clove garlic, minced
4 cups water
1 sprig fresh rosemary, leaves finely chopped
1 sprig fresh thyme, leaves chopped
1 sprig fresh sage, leaves chopped
1 bag (16 ounces) lentils, rinsed
⅓ cup shredded carrot
1 small bunch kale, finely chopped
Salt and pepper, to taste
Brown or white rice (optional)
Fresh chopped cilantro (optional)

1. In a large sauté pan, heat olive oil over medium heat and cook ham and bacon until bacon is crispy. Stir in onion and garlic and cook 15 minutes. (If you have a slow cooker with a sauté setting, you can use that instead.)
2. Add pan contents, water, herbs and lentils to a slow cooker. Cook on low 2–4 hours, until beans are soft and done but not mushy.
3. During the last hour of cooking, add carrot. Add kale during the last 15 minutes of cooking. Taste and season with salt and pepper as desired. Serve over rice with fresh cilantro sprinkled on top, if desired.

\$500 Recipe Contest

SWEET POTATOES DUE APR 10

We want your tried-and-true soups, salads, baked goods and side dishes made from this tasty tuber. Enter at TexasCoopPower.com/contests by April 10.



Herb-Crusted Pork Loin

DONALD MCMAHON
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Adding herbs to your smoker recipes adds even more flavor. McMahon's recipe calls for resting the pork overnight before cooking, so plan ahead. If you don't have a smoker, you can roast the tenderloin in the oven at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

¾ cup fresh cilantro
½ cup fresh oregano
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon whole-grain mustard
1 tablespoon cumin

3 cloves garlic, minced
Juice of 1 large lime
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
16–20 ounces pork tenderloin

1. Combine all ingredients except for pork in a blender or food processor and pulse to form a paste. Taste and adjust salt and pepper as needed. Make 1-inch slits on both sides of the pork loin and coat completely with paste. Refrigerate overnight.

2. When ready to cook, preheat smoker to 225 degrees. Smoke pork 2–3 hours, until it registers 145–160 degrees on a meat thermometer. Let rest 5 minutes before slicing and serving.

SERVES 4–6

TCP WEB EXTRA We have nearly 900 searchable recipes at TexasCoopPower.com, and herbs enhance many of them. Consider them part of your recipe collection.

Fresh Herb Tips

BY MEGAN MYERS

1. Store fresh herbs in a glass or uncovered jar with a few inches of water. Trim the stems so the leaves sit above the edge of the container, and store on the counter or loosely covered in the refrigerator.

2. Maximize herb flavor by chopping finely, which releases more flavorful oils. Make sure to dry them as much as possible beforehand to prevent sticking to the blade.

3. Chop fresh herbs and freeze in ice cube trays with a small amount of olive oil to use as needed.

4. Fresh herbs unavailable? Dried herbs can be substituted, but keep in mind that they are more potent in flavor. You'll need about ⅓ the quantity of dried herbs than fresh, so use a teaspoon of dried for every tablespoon of fresh chopped herbs.

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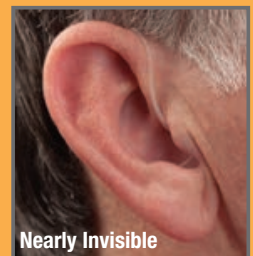
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Heart of the Matter

Set yourself on a course for smack-dab in the middle of the state

BY CHET GARNER

EVERY TEXAN MUST make a pilgrimage to the Alamo and also stop by the state fair to yell “Howdy” at Big Tex. I’ll add another trip to the mandatory list: one to the heart of the Lone Star State.

Texas has a funny shape. Recognizable? Sure. But odd. The idea that someone was able to find the true geographic center of such an irregularity is amazing. But that’s what the Texas Society of Professional Surveyors accomplished by dividing the state into quadrants and confirming the point where the lines intersect. Near that surveyor-approved dot, about 20 miles northeast of Brady, is our destination.

I reached Brady with time to circle its castlelike courthouse and medieval historic jail-turned-county museum. I noticed an abundance of hearts about town and a profusion of businesses using “Heart of Texas” like a country song slogan before I headed north on Texas 377.

I enjoyed the passing landscape dotted with farmhouses. Suddenly, a silver-and-black historical marker appeared. I hit the brakes and veered into a parking area. I got out of my truck and took a deep breath, realizing I was indeed standing in the center of the state I love so much.

I didn’t hear a George Strait song or receive a mysterious message from Sam Houston. In fact, there is not much other than the marker and a fence line of rough cedars. Yet I felt Texan to the core. Now I understand this is the true heart of Texas. It doesn’t hit you in the eye or the stomach but right in the heart. ■

ABOVE Chet at the historical marker denoting the geographic center of Texas.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Chet’s video from the heart of Texas and check out his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

Some events may have been affected by COVID-19. Call or check an event’s website for scheduling details.

APRIL

09

Canton [9–10] Tractor Show and Swap Meet, (214) 837-8861, lewisfirstmonday.com/tractors.html

Waco [9–10] MidTex Farm, Ranch and Garden Show, (254) 757-5600, wacochamber.com/midtex

Fredericksburg [9–11] Texas Vintage Motorcycle Fandango, (214) 912-9245, thetexasfandango.com

Portland [9–11] Windfest, (361) 777-4650, portlandtx.org/windfest-2020

Poteet [9–11] Strawberry Festival, 1-888-742-8144, strawberryfestival.com

San Antonio [9–11] Online Book Festival, (210) 750-8951, sabookfestival.org

Tyler [9–11] Texas Dressage Classic Horse Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

San Angelo [9–24] Rodeo, (325) 653-7785, sanangelorodeo.com

Sherman [9–11, 15–18, 22–25] A Midsummer Night’s Dream, (903) 892-8818, scptheater.com

10

Brenham Michael Martin Murphey, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com/events

Castell Castell Grind, (512) 970-8703, castellgrind.com

Lufkin Montopolis:
The Legend of Big Bend,
(936) 633-5454,
angelinaarts.org/
arts-alive-series

McFaddin Polo at McFaddin,
(361) 575-8228,
navemuseum.com

Chappell Hill [10–11]
Official Bluebonnet Festival
of Texas, (979) 203-1242,
facebook.com/
bluebonnetfestival

Mesquite [10–11, 17–18,
24–25] The Belle of Amherst,
(972) 216-8132,
mesquiteartscenter.org

Waxahachie [10–May 31]
Scarborough Renaissance
Festival, (972) 938-3247,
srfestival.com

Jefferson [16–17] Outlaw
Nationals Car Show,
(903) 665-7121,
outlawnationals.com

Llano [16–17] Crawfish
Open, (325) 247-5354,
llanocrawfishopen.com

Ennis [16–18] Bluebonnet
Trails Festival, (972) 878-
4748, bluebonnettrail.org

Grandview [16–18] Antique
Alley Texas, (817) 666-5024,
facebook.com/
antiquealleytexas

Abilene Philharmonic: Four
Seasons, (325) 677-6710,
abilenephilharmonic.org

Boerne Spring Tractor
Pull and Handcrafted
Market, (210) 445-1080,
ci.boerne.tx.us/calendar

MORE EVENTS >

TCP Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event online for June by April 10, and it just might be featured in this calendar.



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Pick of the Month

Cotton Gin Festival

Burton, April 17
(979) 289-3378
texascottonginmuseum.org

Burton boasts what it says is the oldest operating cotton gin in America. In addition to holding a 21st-century festival that includes a parade, tractor pull, music, contests, games, arts and crafts, and food and drinks, the Texas Cotton Gin Museum turns back the clock. The 1914 gin will crank up and produce a bale of cotton.

APRIL EVENTS CONTINUED

17

Boerne Texas Corvette Association Car Show, (830) 226-5386, ci.boerne.tx.us/calendar

Frankston An English Tea Party, (903) 705-2994

Irving Las Colinas Symphony Orchestra: Kiarra Saito-Beckman, (972) 252-4800, lascolinassymphony.org

New Braunfels [17-18] Old Gruene Market Days, (830) 629-5077, gruenemarketdays.com

18

Fort Worth [18-Aug. 8] An-My Lê: On Contested Terrain, (817) 738-1933, cartermuseum.org

21

Austin Taste of Mexico, (512) 480-9373, mexic-artemuseum.org

Van Horn [21-23] Building Bridges Art Show, (432) 283-2682, vanhornatexas.org

23

Corpus Christi [21-25] The Birdiest Festival in America, (361) 563-5968, birdiestfestival.org

25

Neches [23-25] The 1836, (903) 721-9111, 1836chuckwagonrace.com

Austin Marathon, Half Marathon and 5K, (512) 953-5585, youraustinmarathon.com

30

Jacksonville Chamber Classic Golf Tournament, (903) 586-2217, jacksonvilletexas.com

New Braunfels [30-May 2] Swap Meet, (830) 708-1372, newbraunfelsareacarclub.com

MAY

01

Hilltop Lakes Equestrian Association Kentucky Derby Gala, (713) 503-0470

06

Mesquite Courtyard Concert Series, (972) 216-8132, mesquiteartscenter.org

New Braunfels Sawyer Brown, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org/theater-upcoming-events

Abilene [6-9] Western Heritage Classic, (325) 677-4376, westernheritageclassic.com

Fredericksburg [6-9] 175th Anniversary Opening Weekend Ceremonies, (830) 998-4738, 175th.org

Salado [6-9] Cowboy Poetry and Music Gathering, (254) 702-0979, saladocowboypoetry.com

Brenham [6-9, 13-16, 20-23] Barefoot in the Park, (979) 830-8358, unitybrenham.org

Storms

From snow and ice to tornadoes, droughts and hurricanes, Texans know extreme weather. These readers were quick as lightnin' when bad weather blew through, and we're thunderstruck by what has flooded in.

GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

REAGAN FERGUSON
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

A May night under the full moon as a storm approaches, just north of Harper.

TOM HERRIN
PEDERNALES EC

A Big Bend thunderstorm photographed from Terlingua.

STEVE BENSON
LYNTEGAR EC

Lightning in Ropesville.

LAURA BREWER
COSERV

"Watching the storm roll in over the Gulf of Mexico."

Upcoming Contests

- DUE APR 10 Portraits
- DUE MAY 10 Rust and Decay
- DUE JUN 10 Fillin' Stations

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



Flashes of the Past

Lightning bugs, whether in a jar or flitting freely, still cause wonder

BY BILL SANDERSON

IT WAS THE mid-1950s when my cousins and I discovered the lightning bugs that brought enchantment when we needed it most, after our granddad, H.L. “Livvy” Meador, had recently been boosted to heaven off a Buick’s big bumper as he walked home across Buckner Boulevard one night after church. His death left our grandmother, Ella (“Nonnie”), a lonely widow and cast her daughters in a support orbit along with all of us cousins. We visited her every night.

In late spring and summer, with no air conditioning, we stayed outside, leaping with the lightning bugs that glimmered through Nonnie’s spacious Dallas yard, their blinking radar butts of amber and green a wondrous delight. We captured them by the dozens in Ball canning jars, ice pick holes poked in the top for air.

When the night got cool, Nonnie would go to bed, and we’d head home, but a ritual had begun that still holds wonder.

Powered by silent wings, the wafting lantern bodies of flying beetles are mesmerizing. Lightning bugs don’t bite, sting, smell or sound. All they do in April, May and June is flash a mating ritual come-hither code. They even have the innate good manners to fly low and slow, so any kid can catch one.

Nonnie’s daughters, Nell and Eula Mae (my mother), eventually converted the houses on Grandfather Meador’s acre into a kindergarten and private first grade called Little Folks School. In a backyard cottage we learned to read aloud in unison, with Nell as our teacher. Often she admonished me, with uneven success, “Bill, pay attention.”

Youngster days now distant in my life’s rearview mirror, I’m returned several decades later to Nonnie’s yard, now my own residence. Paying attention is what I have set out to do recently, and this is my 21st evening to commune with the lightning bugs. They fly around the old merry-go-round and flit among fruitful pear trees that Livvy Meador planted in 1947.

A wonky navigator, the lightning bug bumps into things sideways, and it seldom lands on what it hits. Bottom-heavy with bioluminescence (using a chemical called luciferase), it resembles a small honeybee. When its light switches on, its flight trajectory seems to shift upward. When it senses you approaching, it moves away, slowly—sort of a lumbering light melody in the dark. Imagine a lightning bug version of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Flight of the Bumblebee*, minus its frenetic sense—more of a Nyquil feel, draping a curtain of dusk in which to make an escape.

Their time is short-lived over the summer’s arc, but if you pay attention in the season, you’ll spot these monarchs of the night.

Keep a Ball jar handy. ■

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